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SUBJECT: MONUC REPORTS SIX CONGOLESE DEAD, FOUR WOUNDED IN
LAKE ALBERT CONFRONTATION

¶1. (SBU) Summary. MONUC reports that Ugandan troops killed six Congolese and wounded five others after firing on a Congolese vessel on Lake Albert September 24. All but one were civilians. The confrontation followed an incident earlier in the day in which MONUC naval forces intercepted and subsequently released a Heritage Oil vessel carrying five civilians on the Congolese side of the demarcation line. MONUC together with Congolese civil and military authorities have opened an investigation into the incident. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Troops on a Ugandan military vessel opened fire on a civilian Congolese boat on Lake Albert north of the island of Rukwanze on the afternoon of September 24, killing six and wounding five, Yasmine Thiam of MONUC's Bunia office reported September 25. Thiam cautioned that MONUC was working to confirm details of the incident, but told us that information received to date indicated all of those reported killed were Congolese civilians -- including men, women and an infant -- as were all but one of the wounded. The remaining casualty was a member of the Congolese military's (FARDC) naval force. Thiam said MONUC transported three seriously wounded children for treatment in Bunia.

¶3. (SBU) Thiam said that a joint fact-finding mission of MONUC, FARDC and local authorities had departed the Ituri District capital of Bunia to investigate. She said press reports datelined September 25 from Kampala and Kinshasa were inaccurate. A report appearing on the web site of Kampala-based The Monitor stated one Ugandan and one Congolese soldier were killed following an exchange of gunfire, while MONUC's Radio Okapi reported that 10 Congolese had been killed and eight wounded in a Ugandan attack on a civilian boat. Thiam said MONUC's Kampala office was working to engage senior Ugandan officials to correct earlier reports.

¶4. (SBU) Thiam reported the confrontation took place at around 1515 local time September 24 and was preceded by an incident two hours earlier in which a Ugandan boat carrying five civilians associated with the Canadian firm Heritage Oil was intercepted in Congolese waters by a vessel of MONUC's Uruguayan naval detachment. She said that MONUC prevented Congolese forces from firing on the boat and released it to return to Uganda after determining that its five occupants -- four Ugandans and a Kenyan -- were civilians.

¶5. (SBU) Thiam said after learning of the incident the Ugandan military (UDPF) dispatched a number of soldiers in another vessel, which confronted a Congolese boat carrying some 50 civilians and two members of the FARDC naval force on the Congolese side of the demarcation line. She said that

the UDPF soldiers indiscriminately opened fire when the two navy men refused their demand to disarm. She said the Congolese vessel was subsequently able to make its way to the MONUC naval base at Kasenyi.

¶6. Comment. Much remains to be confirmed about the incident. However, MONUC's account is evidently based on reports of its Uruguayan contingent on the scene. It is impossible to tell at this point how this will affect the goodwill generated by the recent Kabila-Museveni summit in Arusha and the Tripartite Plus meeting in Kampala, but both sides will be focusing on damage control pending the results of the investigation. End comment.

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